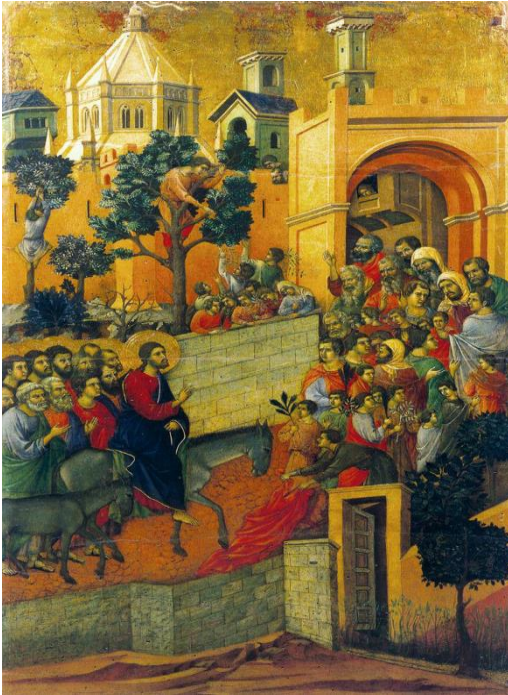


2023 April 2nd - Palm Sunday.

Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:19-24. Isaiah 50:4-9a;
Psalm 31:9-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66



Today's readings begin with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and end with the tomb being sealed on his dead body. It is a day of contrasts, on the one hand, the excitement and joy of the crowd seeing the Messiah, the Liberator, the Great Deliverer entering Jerusalem and reclaiming the temple: All glory, laud and honour to thee, Redeemer King; on the other, the horror of Jesus deserted in the garden, tried before Pilate, beaten by the soldiers, crucified beside criminals and laid dead in the tomb; on the one hand, the tenderness of the love shared by Jesus and the disciples at the Last

Supper, on the other, the despair of the disciples as they fall away, deny him, leave him to his death: ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp, ride on to die.

Although today is the day after April Fool's Day, the events of Palm Sunday, the events of Holy Week, the whole event of the life of Christ, does sound rather like an April Fool.

If you wanted to reform the world, would you send a new-born babe to do it? No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

If you wanted to overcome the military and political might of empires, would you come riding on a donkey? No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

If you wanted to set up an organisation to transform hearts, minds, lives and civilisations, would you choose twelve ill-educated, rather dim men, one of whom you knew to be a boastful coward and one of whom you knew to be a traitor. No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

If you wanted to speak truth to power would you stand silent before your accusers and judge? No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

If you wanted to bring life to a dying world would you subject yourself to torture, crucifixion and a lonely death? No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

If you wanted to bring hope to those who fear death would you rescue a condemned criminal? No, of course not. But God did. April Fool!

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians Jesus emptied himself of heavenly power and authority, took the form of a slave and humbled himself to be obedient to death on a cross. The world and the Satan thought that they had overcome him, they thought that he was weak and foolish and that by putting him to death they could overpower him and undermine his life's work. They thought they had defeated him. But then Jesus rose from the dead and was exalted by his Father to his right hand in heaven, given the name that is above all other names, so that the whole world must acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What an amazing reversal of expectations. The devil thought that Jesus was defeated and that he had won, but God's power confounded him, and now the devil has been defeated with no hope of a second chance, no hope of reversing the new status quo. In the eyes of the world Jesus' whole life and mission was an April Fool, and yet it is God who has the last laugh, for God turns the whole world upside down to set it right again.

So, this week we enter into the final and terrible journey of Jesus' life here on earth, knowing that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, the victory of God is greater than the victory of man, and the life of God transforms the life of the world.

2023 April 6th - Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:9-end;

1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35.

Tonight we recall the Last Supper, the meal which Jesus shared with his friends when he broke the bread and poured the wine and said "This is me. Every time you eat and drink I am with you." Within just a few years of Jesus' death this had become a defining act of Christian worship: St Paul records that he was taught to remember Jesus this way, and we know that it is one of the things that the Romans noticed about the first Christians, that they met together for a special meal.

How strange, then, that on the night we celebrate the Last Supper we hear a reading not about eating, but about washing. St John is the only Gospeller to record the night when Jesus and his friends were eating supper, and Jesus took off his coat, picked up a bath towel, and began to wash his disciples' feet.

Tonight at the Maundy Thursday eucharist I might wash some people's feet, but most people will keep their shoes and socks on and their feet firmly planted on the ground, just in case. I wonder what would have happened if St John's Gospel had been the only Gospel, would we have washed each other's feet every Sunday, or would we have watched others washing and kept our feet dry and shod?

The Gospels begin Jesus' preparation for ministry with washing, with baptism. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was baptising anyone who repented, anyone who admitted their sin, said sorry and turned back to God. Jesus didn't have any sin to admit and had never turned away from God, so John the Baptist didn't want to baptise Jesus, but Jesus insisted. He said it was so that righteousness could be fulfilled, he did it so that he could be like us so that we could become like him. He did it so that we could be washed clean in his water and he could bear our dirty water away.

Now, as Jesus prepares for the final part of his earthly ministry, his death, his martyrdom, his witness to God's saving power, there is washing again. Last time it was Jesus who was washed, this time it's Jesus who does the washing, both times the washing is God's sign, God's sign of forgiveness, God's sign of cleansing, God's sign that in Jesus God became man, and through Jesus man will be brought to God.



Jesus tells his disciples to follow his example, to do what he has done, to wash each other's feet, and tonight we will literally follow his example, literally wash each other's feet. But, is that all that Jesus meant, once a year a brave few take their socks off in a cold church so that the Vicar can wash their feet? Did he not rather ask us to care for and serve each other in every way, just as he cared for and served his friends. He gave his disciples the new commandment to love each other as much as he loved them, and that old-new commandment is the new-old commandment for us this Maundy Thursday, every Maundy Thursday, every day, this day.

Another St John wrote that God is love and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them. When Jesus washed his disciples and fed his disciples he loved them and filled them with his love. When we draw close to him in the Eucharist, in the foot-washing, in the prayers and expectations of this night, we know the depth and breadth and strength of his love for us, and we are given a deep, broad, strong love for God and from God for others.

So, draw near with faith, receive the body of the Lord which was broken for you and his blood which was shed for you, feel the touch of his hand on you, know the power of his love in you, live the life that his death and resurrection have given you, and give all this away so that others can feel it, know it, have it too.

Image: Sieger Köder: Washing of the Feet

2023 April 7th - Good Friday

I wonder which word comes to mind when you think about the events of Good Friday? The word 'sordid' came into my mind unbidden and I had to look it up to see if it was appropriate. My dictionary lists the following meanings for 'sordid': dishonourable, distasteful, immoral, squalid and mean. It seems a very good choice of word. For Jesus was pushed about, shuffled between different people, different councils and authorities like an animal destined for slaughter, which of course he was. The question was, 'Who would do the slaughtering?'

The Jews had no authority to condemn anyone to death (not that this stopped them turning a blind eye to the occasional stoning of some poor soul). The High Priests, Annas and Caiphas, were keen to see Jesus dead but unwilling to soil their hands. Even when the Sanhedrin had enough evidence to condemn him and could incite the crowds to call for his death, they passed the decision to Pilate, who referred it on to Herod who bounced him back. Pilate tried to release Jesus, unable to find fault under Roman law to condemn him. But he found himself stuck with him – so much so that he said 'I wash my hand of this man's blood'.

No one wanted to be the ones to kill Jesus but they all seemed to want him dead. When the options ran out he was killed. The whole episode is pathetic. One of the most pathetic aspects is that everyone wanted to pass the buck. Evil would not accept its own responsibility – rather it sought to put the blame on everyone else – anyone else. 'They did it – them over there – the Pharisees, the High Priest, the Roman Soldiers, Herod, Pilate and even the mob'. They were all culpable, and so are we!

Jesus, stripped, beaten humiliated, flogged, crowned with thorns, teased and intimidated, toyed with by the soldiers and the bystanders, stabbed in his side, bloodied and beaten, dies. He dies with words that we would never suspect would come from the lips of one so ill-treated, 'Father, forgive, for they know not what they do.' He forgives them all, the high priests, the council, the Jews, the Soldiers, Romans, his own followers – all of them. He welcomes a criminal into paradise with him. He cares for his mother. He calls to God in his anguish 'Why have YOU forsaken me'. Then he allows himself to feel something human and asks for something to drink, before finally committing his soul to his Father and dying.



Then out of love, shame, compassion, remorse, affection and who knows what other emotions, his body is placed in a borrowed tomb by the women who must leave it during the Sabbath and return to it on the first day of the week.

It is devastating. Everything they had wished for appears to be over. There is little hope in these events. We have all contributed to killing our best hope for reconciliation with God. We have given ourselves over to the way of darkness.

But is this really the end? Or is it really a triumph? Bad Friday or Good Friday?

In these bleak hours as we contemplate the death of Jesus and await the end of the story, we might pray:

Lord in the desolation of the cross we see your love proclaimed. In the helplessness of death you have saved the world. We praise God that in the moment of death Christ has destroyed the power of death.

*We pray for the dying and the departed, especially those closest to us.
We pray for all those who are dying today, especially for those who die alone.*

We pray for those who fear dying. And we pray for hospices and all those who minister to the terminally ill.

*In the midst of death we find life
For Jesus Christ has conquered the grave. Amen.*

Tony White

Image: Crucifixion by Hendrick ter Brugghen

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2023 April 8th - Easter Eve.

Easter Eve is a “forgotten” day. After the high emotion of Good Friday and before the high drama of Easter Day itself, Easter Eve is often overlooked. Today Jesus lies in the tomb, resting, waiting for resurrection in the morning. While Jesus rests in the tomb we cannot celebrate Holy Communion, we cannot celebrate new life, we too must wait and rest.

So, wait we do, but rarely do we rest! Today is the day for frantic shopping for Easter Eggs and half-legs of lamb; today is the day for decking the church with flowers and Easter garden displays; today is the day for catching up on all the things that didn't get done yesterday and won't get done tomorrow. In our busy-ness we often lose sight of Easter Eve, so much so that most people bypass the day entirely and call it “Easter Saturday”, which it isn't. (Here follows a short excursus: Easter begins on Easter Day; Easter Saturday must follow Easter Day, so it has to be seven days later.)

All the things we do: cleaning and decorating and shopping have their place, their value, their importance, but so does the thing we don't do; so does resting, waiting, being empty, as Jesus did and was on this day. When we wait on this day we acknowledge the astounding fact that the Son of God really did die; when we make this day and ourselves empty, we admit the startling reality that we too will die; when we rest on this day we recognise the empowering fact that resurrection and life in all its fullness are not ours to make, create or give, but are God's gift.

When we rush about cleaning, decorating, shopping, preparing, making sure that everything is perfect for the morrow, we are in control. Easter happens because we get it ready; resurrection is celebrated because we sort it out; new life is enjoyed because we procure it. (And here follows another short excursus: Jesus was in the tomb three days because Roman counting was “inclusive”, so Jesus was in the tomb for Friday evening, all day Saturday, and early Sunday morning: that's three days.)

But really, we know it's none of our doing. As Jesus said, no-one can worry an extra inch to their height, or an extra year to their age. We cannot make daily life, never mind the fullness of eternal life.

We will be busy this evening when we light the fire and the paschal candles, when we hear the stories of God's redemption since the beginning of the world, and when we sing together “The Light of Christ” and rejoice in his resurrection. (And here follows a final short excursus: in the Jewish and Christian tradition a feast day or festival begins on the eve of the festival, hence Christmas Eve, All Hallows' Eve and Easter Eve.) But before we are busy, we must be like Ezekiel's dry bones, lying, waiting; before we are busy we must allow God to be busy with us; before we are busy, we must let God do the real work of salvation, resurrection and enlivening.

So, if all you have done today is sit in a sunny garden (or sit by the fire), then you have done all that you need to do. Tomorrow, you must rush out and tell everyone about the resurrection, but today you must wait with Jesus for God to do his great work.



image: Shutterstock

2023 April 9th - Easter Sunday.

Jeremiah 31:1-6, Psalm 118:14-24,
Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 28:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

It's easy for us to get blasé about Easter Sunday. "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" we say, knowing it's true, but so used to the words that we fail to be surprised by them. But really, today is the most surprising of days! How can it be that someone who was dead is alive; someone whose body was placed in a tomb is walking in a garden; someone who lived over two-thousand years ago is standing in our churches this morning gathering us around his holy table?

God is unchanging. His commands have always been to love him, to love our neighbour; to seek him and grow to be more like him, seen through our care for those who are impoverished in any way; to live like him and love like him. Right from the first interactions between God and his people, right from the story of creation, God's words and actions have been life-giving to his world.

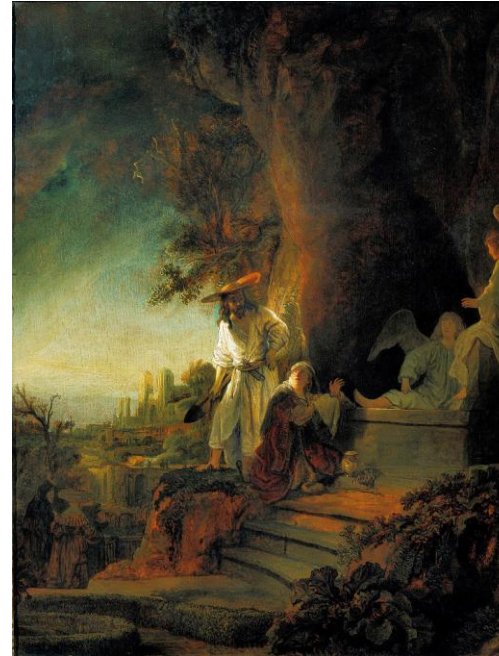
And yet, for all that God is unchanging, he is also the God who does new and life-changing things. When his people had been in exile, their land destroyed by an enemy army, their homes and temple, leaders and rulers destroyed by superior fire-power; when his people had nothing to hope for, then God did something new and life changing. He promised a new heaven and a new earth, a fresh start, a new way of living and a new joy in life.

The restoration of the people of Israel to their own land was only the start of this. As St Peter said, in Acts 10, Jesus who was born in a particular time and place, a particular person, was also God the Son who is eternal, not constrained by the particularities of place or time. That Jesus who lived and died in Israel, was raised to life in Israel, and now lives eternally so that he can be met and known by people living throughout the world, in every place and in every time.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the living proof that although death is a fact of life, death is not the last word. Jesus was raised from the dead, and in his resurrection he has broken through the kingdom of the dead and toppled death from his usurped position. Although all must face death, death cannot hold on to those whom God has raised

from the dead, those who, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, are rescued from the power and authority of the grave, to rise to eternal life. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!


Still, death is real. For Jesus to rise, he must first die; for us to rise, we must first die. Today is a day of rejoicing, a day when we celebrate Christ's resurrection and the way he has changed life for ever. But on that first Easter morning, before the rejoicing came fear, worry and pain. Although we hold firm to Christ's promise of resurrection from the dead,



we do have to face death and that can be disorientating. When we mourn, whether for someone who died recently, or someone who died decades ago, we do truly mourn, and no promise of resurrection to eternal life takes away the pain of missing and mourning for our loved ones who have died.

And so this morning we go early to the tomb, and in the quiet of the garden we can bring to God our sorrows, our worries, our fears and know that even on resurrection morning, God has time to hear our cries, and to speak to each of us personally, by name, to assure us that the Jesus who walked the earth is

still walking beside us in joy and in sorrow, and will walk with us, and those we love right into death and out into eternal life. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

image: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn 1606 – 1669 The Risen Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen oil on canvas (61 × 50 cm) — 1638  Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace, London

2023 April 16th - Second Sunday of Easter

*Exodus 14:10-end, Acts 2: 14a, 23-32
Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1: 3-9, John 20: 19-end*

Today's readings focus on reasons to believe. Of course, there are many – perhaps as numerous as the people who give them.

Our gospel reading starts on the evening of the first Easter Day with the disciples meeting in misery and fear, in a locked room. They have heard the words of Mary, Peter, John about the empty tomb and what it might mean. Mary is the only one who can claim to have seen the risen Lord, and even she has to admit that she did not recognise him at first.

Then into this locked room comes Jesus himself – a locked door and solid walls are no deterrent to the one who has risen from a stone tomb, risen from death. Jesus' first words are words of healing and forgiveness. He does not ask them why they abandoned him, why they ran away, why Peter denied ever knowing him. Rather, he says 'Peace be with you.' He bears the wounds of his execution, but he is full of extraordinary life. It is unmistakably Jesus, and they believe.

But Thomas for whatever reason is not with them. When he learns of this encounter, he proclaims that he will not believe unless he sees with his own eyes, touches with his own hands. He lays out very precisely what will convince him, and nothing less will do.

A week later – bringing us effectively to today – the disciples are again in that same room and Jesus appears to them again, but this time focusing on Thomas, who is present. Thomas gets his proof, and makes his declaration of faith, 'My Lord and my God'.

Thus, the disciples had their reason to believe – they had personally witnessed Jesus risen and present to them – seen him, heard him, touched him.

Moving on to the reading from Acts, we are now at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit inspired the still cautious and fearful disciples. In response, Peter preached the first and probably the greatest of all Christian sermons. Central to his message was that Jesus truly is the Son of God, was crucified, was truly dead and now is risen, and is truly alive 'and we are witnesses to this fact'. As Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell has commented 'what more is to be said?'

Peter gave the crowd reasons to believe in a number of ways. First, he is giving them a new way of seeing what they already knew to be true. They knew of Jesus, and they knew what happened to him. Some of them may have witnessed

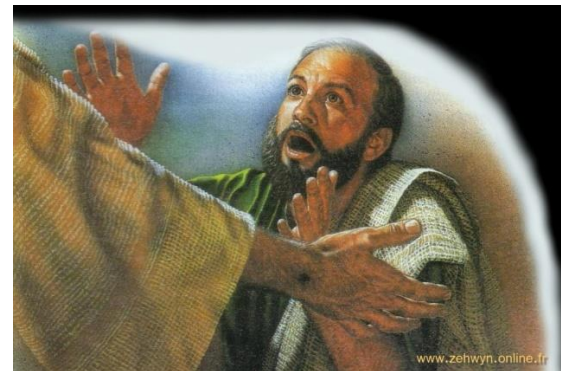
his crucifixion. All of them knew that this man was killed for very tenuous reasons. Using their own scriptures, Peter demonstrated that this man that they thought dead is alive with the life of God. He challenges them 'You killed this man.' There is no beating about the bush, but now they can confess, and hear that God's purpose was not deflected by their actions. They can repent and believe.

Finally, if you read the Epistle for today (1 Peter 1: 3-9) you will find that Peter's readers are given two further reasons for believing – hope and community. Peter was writing much later, at a time when the early church was being viciously persecuted. The hope expressed is that this talk of the resurrection of Jesus was true. Because it is true, there is perhaps some point and purpose to life. We are not just born to suffer and to die but are actually part of a dynamic movement towards the kingdom of God. This makes us members of a community of believers who try to live as though life matters. We have thrown caution to the wind, and accepted as true what so many think ridiculous. And as they and we do so, we will find the Holy Spirit filling our hearts with joy.

What is your reason for believing? Or perhaps, like Thomas you have doubts and seek proof. God in his graciousness may well meet you at this point, as he met Thomas. But then he will give you himself, and after that, you will need nothing more.

God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell:

Fill your church with faith and hope, for a new day has dawned, and the way to life stands open in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.



'My Lord and my God'

<https://epmc.blog4ever.com/relecture-adresse-aux-juniors-et-aux-seniors-en-ce-deuxieme-dimanche-de-paques-2016>

Tony White

2023 April 23rd - Third Sunday of Easter.

Zephaniah 3:14-end; Acts 2:14a, 36-41;

Psalms 116:1-7; Luke 24:13-35.

The world has, by and large, forgotten about Easter by now. The schools are back, the University will soon be back, most people will have eaten any Easter eggs which they received. We're not looking back to Easter, rather we're looking forward to the summer, warm weather, flourishing gardens and three bank holidays in May!



Perhaps it feels out of step for the church to be still looking back to Easter. We've got the message: Jesus died, then he rose; why do we have to keep having Easter readings, Easter hymns and Sundays of Easter?

But here's another way to look at things. Maybe the church is not looking back to Easter, maybe the church is looking both at the

here and now and into the future. Maybe we have these many weeks of Easter because we live in Easter all the time. Jesus, the Son of God, was born in a particular time and lived and died in a particular time, but he rose to eternal life, life which is now for all time. And we who have been baptised into his death and his resurrection are beginning to live that eternal life now, for although we will die, the life that was planted in us at Baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit means that we shall live in eternity with God. Living in Easter is the first part of living eternal life.

We have got so used to the thought of Easter over the past 2,000 years that we forget how momentous this is. We do not merely pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done here on earth as it is in heaven", but we are already living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, here on earth as it is in heaven. And that is an amazing thought. No wonder that when Peter preached his first sermon after the resurrection, reminding his hearers of what had happened to Jesus (something that many would have known at first or second hand), shewing how this was not a break with their faith, but rather the realisation of God's promises, asking them to consider whether they lived in the kingdom of God or not – no wonder when Peter preached thousands were converted.

And so today. When we hear the Gospel read, when we hear of Jesus meeting his disciples on the road to Emmaus and speaking to them of the realisation of God's kingdom, when we hear Peter's sermon read to us and realise God's great works, when we hear the prophet Zephaniah celebrating God on earth as it is in heaven, when we hear all that, what do we do? We have resurrection life, it cannot be taken away from us. But life is for living. If we accept the gift of God's life and then put it away in a drawer or cupboard, keeping it safe, keeping it for best, then we are not living it.

I wonder what it is like to choose each day to live as citizens of heaven, to live "thy kingdom come, thy will be done here, right here, on earth as it is in heaven"? I wonder how that will change our interactions with family, friends, even enemies. I wonder how that will change our interactions with our environment. I wonder what practical and political decisions we will make to honour God and his kingdom in our every day Easter lives?

Perhaps that feels like a lot of effort to no return. We are few. How can any one of us live an Easter life so that where we are God's kingdom may be seen more clearly? But we are not as few as Jesus' first disciples: a group of twelve, one of whom was dead before the resurrection. And because the remaining eleven lived God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven, the knowledge of God spread across the world, even into rural Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.

What is the one thing I can do this day that will be a glimpse of God's kingdom here for me, for my household, for the people I meet? Perhaps it will be the way I speak to and treat people, perhaps it will be the way that I use the precious resources of the earth, perhaps it will be the letter I write to the Prime Minister or to my local MP about an ethical or moral issue which impacts on legislation and life for all.

And what about you? What is the thing you can do this day that will be a glimpse of God's kingdom here and now? And what will be the thing tomorrow, and the day after and the day after that? We are living in Easter all day and every day, so we need to live thy kingdom come, thy will be done, now and every day.

image: Fritz von Uhde. **Walking to Emmaus** (1891) Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden

X 2023 April 23rd. - Third Sunday of Easter.

Zephaniah 3:14-end, Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116, Luke 24:13-35

Last Sunday was the second Sunday of Easter, the final day of the Octave of Easter. Traditionally it is known as “Low Sunday”. On Easter Sunday the Church celebrated with High Mass, with music and incense and processions and bells and gorgeous vestments; the following Sunday was a much quieter affair, a “Low Mass”. Although, looking at the numbers in the congregation on the second Sunday of Easter one might be forgiven for thinking that “low” refers to attendance. Whereas everyone makes the effort to be in church for Easter Day, the second Sunday of Easter seems to be the day when people reward themselves with a day off!

There is, however, another way that today could be “low.” After we’ve achieved something we have longed for we often feel low. Do you remember as a child the frantic excitement building towards Christmas Day: the letter to Father Christmas, hanging up a stocking, getting back from church and opening your presents, and then on Boxing Day feeling a bit flat. You had everything you wanted, you’d been high on excitement, but suddenly the world felt a bit grey and you felt a bit low. Wedding couples often tell me that after the months of elaborate preparation and anticipation they often feel rather low when they get back from their honeymoon, as if nothing that nice will ever happen again. Now they have to get back to everyday living, and they feel rather low. And Easter can feel like that. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! But now what?

Resurrection to eternal life is something that we look forward to after death. Jesus died, and lay in the tomb for three days, and then he rose to eternal life, the life which never ends, which never dies. If we too are to enter into resurrection life, then we too must die first. So, is the resurrection something that will affect us only after our death? Is the resurrection something for sometime in the future? Is the resurrection only important once life here on earth is over?

Surely not! For the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples and transformed them NOW! The disciples were hiding in a locked room, afraid that the people who had done away with Jesus would be looking to do away with them. And Jesus appeared and shewed his resurrection body to them, and breathed his Holy Spirit on them, and gave them his peace.

And they were transformed from a group in hiding to people prepared to go and tell and even to die because nothing mattered as much as Jesus’ resurrection for them. Those who hadn’t encountered the risen Christ were not so changed. St Thomas, Doubting Thomas, had not been present with Jesus appeared in that locked room, and so St Thomas, Doubting Thomas, was not yet transformed by an encounter with Jesus. And yet, when he did meet the risen Saviour face to face, he too was changed, changed not in the future, but changed NOW, in the present.



And what about us. “Lo, Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb” we sang on Easter Sunday. Is it just for Easter Sunday and then for some unimaginable time in the future when we will encounter the risen Jesus in heaven? Are we changed in the future, or are we changed in the present, are we changed NOW?

In our baptism the priest dunked us under the water, or poured water on us, three times because we are baptised first into Jesus’ death and then into his resurrection. Jesus was three days in the tomb, we are three times under the water to remind us that he died like us so that we might rise like him. From that moment of baptism we have his eternal life in us now. We live a double life, the life our parents gave us which may last for decades, and the life of God which will last for ever.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! And Hallelujah! We too shall rise. But meanwhile the resurrection life of Christ is already within us, changing us, making us different from people without that life. Changing our priorities, changing our expectation, changing our hopes and fears.

Last week was Low Sunday, but for us the expectation is neither over nor delayed. We are living now as people filled with the life of the risen Christ. I wonder how you will shew that life to yourself and to those you meet?

Duccio di Buoninsegna. Christ Appears to the Apostles Behind Closed Doors
Museo dell’Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Sien

THIS VERSION WAS NOT PUBLISHED

2023 April 30th. - Fourth Sunday of Easter.

Genesis 7; Psalm 23; Acts 2:42-end; John 10:1-10.

We are still in Easter season, and yet today's readings do not sound very "Easter-y". There's no resurrection account, rather Noah's Ark, Jesus the Good Shepherd and people being baptised after a sermon. But there is something very Easter-y going on. In one of the prophecies we read at Christmas the prophet Isaiah looks towards the time when God's king will reign on earth and all the divisions and destructions which people have made will be overcome and put right. One of the images the prophet uses to show how amazing it will be when God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven, is the image of the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear, the child and the poisonous snake, all living and eating and playing together. When God's kingdom comes the whole world will live in harmony (see Isaiah 11:1-9).

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesy that when God's king reigns on earth sinful, human-made political oppression will cease. They use the image of the Good Shepherd, through whom God's kingdom will be here on earth as it is in heaven (see Jeremiah 23:1-5; Ezekiel 34).

When Christ is King, when God's kingdom comes on earth, the damage wrought by human sins will be put right. God's good creation will be restored; God's good people will be redeemed. In Easter we are reminded that Christ is King and God's kingdom is coming, but we live in an "already but not yet" stage. Jesus' death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, but Judgement Day has not yet come, God's new heaven and new earth are not around us. We still live in a broken world.



Sometimes the story of Noah's ark is told as some sort of proto-conservation story. It isn't that. It's a puzzling and worrying story about the consequences of human sin. There's a lot to be said about it and a lot to be drawn out of it (indeed, at one point my PhD thesis contained a whole chapter on it) but the thing that I want to

focus on now is the impact of human sin on the natural world. In Genesis 6:11-13 we read 'Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence...And God said to Noah "I have determined to make an end of all flesh.'" The world which God had made to be good had been spoiled by the people whom God had made to be very good. The pre-flood

world looked a lot like our world today, and not much like the restored world promised by the Prophet Isaiah.

Human sin has an impact on all life: the life of the sinner (that's you and me), the life of the sinned against (that's you and me too) and the world in which the sinner lives, that's our world, the only world we have. We know that it is human decisions which oppress people and human activity which wreaks havoc with the created world. Choosing to do the wrong thing when you know it is the wrong thing, failing to do the right thing when you know it is the right thing is a definition of sin (James 4:17). Political actions which oppress people or degrade the natural environment are sin.

But what can we do about it? We are not very important people, we don't dictate policy. But of course we do vote. Do we vote for people who try to live like the Good Shepherd? And of course, we do interact with God's creation in the fuel we use, the food we buy, the impact we have on the part of the world where we live, and often, through our shopping choices, on the parts where we don't live too. Do we interact in ways which preserve our planet or destroy our planet?

If we believe that Jesus's resurrection has conquered sin and death, perhaps we need to think about how we can live like citizens of the sinless, deathless kingdom of God. The Church of England has asked every church building to become "net zero carbon", in other words to stop contributing to the global warming which is destroying our planet (we will be working on this through PCC meetings in the next year). Knowing that human activity is warming our world and thereby destroying human and animal habitats, and doing nothing about it, is an example of human sin. Yes, it's difficult, our whole way of life has developed from the expectation that we could do whatever we liked on earth without any consequences; living whole-heartedly in a way which has no negative impact on eco-systems, environments, people, plants and animals may be impossible for us to achieve. Even our individual votes and our individual shopping cannot have much impact. But that is all we have: our individual choices and each individual choice can reflect careless human sin, or care for God's world and all that is in it.

If we are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, we should be like him. If Jesus has redeemed us from sin, we should live like him. If we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven by our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection we should act like it. I'm not telling you how to vote or how to act or what choices to make, but I am inviting you to join me as together we try to work out how our lives can reflect the truth of God's actions in Jesus for all the world, so that our world reflects God's glory and not our shame.

image [Jan Brueghel the Elder. The Animals Board Noah's Ark. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.](#)